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SUBJECT: OMAN: MEPI REPORT CARD

¶1. (U) SUMMARY. Many of the major projects funded by the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) over the past years are now, in one way or another, at a crossroads. With the 2007-08 program season winding down, Muscat's MEPI team, under the guidance of the Ambassador, offers this review of MEPI's activities and their local impact, with the goal of laying the foundation for future activities in each key program area. Activities are organized by MEPI pillar, and each project is assigned a standardized "grade", based on the MissionQs assessment of effectiveness, after a capsule description and the identification of special areas of success or concern. These grades range from A to C; a majority of projects received a grade in the B range, while three projects not yet fully underway received an Incomplete.

¶2. (SBU) The assessment offers up some significant success in our MEPI programming in Oman and confirms Oman as a genuine MEPI partner. As we have long known, the more successful projects addressed recognized Omani needs as well as our own MEPI program and Mission goals, achieved sustained buy-in from the relevant local partner(s), received sustained support, including resources, from the USG, and acknowledged and accommodated prevailing idiosyncrasies of the Omani cultural and political space. The less successful projects fell short in one or more areas. Finally, the assessment highlights areas for potential future MEPI programming and confirms Oman as a genuine, if discriminating, partner. END SUMMARY.

WHY A REPORT CARD?

¶3. (U) MEPI funding has been instrumental in the development of Oman's efforts to improve its education system, empower women, expand public participation in governance, and reform and modernize its economy. In each MEPI pillar area, by identifying the initial need, examining program implementation, and evaluating results, we have been able to assess MEPI's successes and to identify areas for improvement. Post's MEPI team has accordingly reviewed the portfolio of long-term, centrally funded projects (i.e. no local grants, fellowships or workshops) currently active or recently completed in Oman, and provided a working "report card" based on the view from the field.

¶4. (U) Factors considered in calculating the grades were:

- evidence of impact;
- whether baseline targets were met;
- sustainability and local buy-in; and
- relevance to Mission goals.

The fact that each reviewed project initially underwent a careful vetting process before approval for implementation contributed greatly to the relative success of most MEPI activities.

PILLAR I: IMPROVING EDUCATION

5 (U) Primary goals for the Education Pillar in Oman have included creating a curriculum that promotes creative and critical thinking; training students to be better future citizens and leaders; and equipping students with the skills required to actively and effectively participate in their country's developing social, political and economic spheres.

16. (U) PARTNERSHIP SCHOOLS PROJECT (PSP)

PROGRAM PARTNER: Creative Associates International Inc.

CAPSULE: PSP seeks to promote creative and critical thinking in students by instructing teachers in the active learning approach of Child Centered Methodology (CCM), offering principal leadership training (PLT), creating an online teacher training portal (ICT), and developing the "Lifeskills" curriculum for grades 11 and 12. The project has seen enormous success in its four years of cooperation with the Ministry of Education (MOE): CCM is on track to make a lasting impression with efforts underway to expand the number of CCM schools; ICT is to be integrated into the Ministry's education technology strategy; Lifeskills was made a mandatory course for all schools; and PLT was expanded to include regional supervisors and made, by Ministerial Decree, the national model for the future. The project received overwhelming support from the MOE, including the allocation of significant dedicated staff and other resources solely to PSP. Strong evidence of the Ministry's commitment was seen most recently by the creation of thoughtful and realistic expansion and

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sustainability plans for all four PSP programs. Despite the MOEQs zeal for the project and hopes to continue MOE-USG partnership in Omani education development, the Ministry feels that the MOE-MEPI relationship was damaged by inconsistent funding and limited contact with Washington.

PROS: Wide reaching, national, sustainable impact; open door for future U.S.-Oman educational input; strong local buy-in demonstrated through MOE sustainability plans for each PSP component; very positive Embassy, USG relationship with MOE, including the Minister.

CONS: The ICT component achieved limited success to date due to lack of national high-speed Internet infrastructure outside of the capital; Washington-directed interruption of project funding negatively affected MOE confidence in U.S. commitment to the partnership (this issue will be addressed SEPTEL).

GRADE: A

17. (U) ARAB CIVITAS

PROGRAM PARTNER: Center for Civic Education (CCE)

CAPSULE: This program was initiated to encourage active citizenry. "Project Citizen" is being piloted in one or two Cycle 2 schools (Grades 5-10) in each of Oman's 11 regions. The program has students identify an issue of concern in their community and equips them with the skills to work together to develop a plan to solve the problem. Students have responded positively to the project, identifying local issues of pressing concern. Each school chose one or two issues; topics ranged from road safety to drug use. However, since Oman was added near the end of this grant, the MOE is concerned about how to sustain and expand the project after such a short pilot period and no foreseeable future USG support. Despite the MOE's desire for such a program, the Ministry lamented the lack of communication with Washington and shared that they would not have implemented the project if they had known that MEPI did not have a clear plan for program sustainability.

PROS: Positive impact in an area previously unexplored in Omani education; students learn to critically research and

analyze local issues.

CONS: No expansion or sustainability plan; poor communication between MOE and Department of State resulted in MOE questioning of USG commitment and follow through.

GRADE: C

18. (U) MEPI SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

PROGRAM PARTNER: The American International School in Muscat (TAISM)

CAPSULE: Starting in 2007-08, working through the Department's Office of Overseas Schools, this program offers scholarships to Omani students to attend the Embassy-affiliated American International School of Muscat (TAISM) for grades 7 through 12. The program has been rapturously received by the Ministry of Education, and its positive impact strongly endorsed by TAISM. A second group of four students is now being identified for 2008-09, with indications that funding may be forthcoming for a third batch in 2009-2010.

PROS: Extraordinary opportunity for deserving Omani students; increased diversity enriches TAISM; prepares beneficiaries for U.S./international higher education while enhancing their critical thinking skills and sense of community responsibility.

CONS: Small number of beneficiaries and limited impact on the greater community; substantial institutional commitment necessary over multiple years.

GRADE: A-

19. (U) Higher Education for Development (HED) UNIVERSITY

LINKAGES

PROGRAM PARTNERS: Mazoon College/University of Missouri Rolla; Sultan Qaboos University/Northern Kentucky University

CAPSULE: Oman has participated in two University Linkage programs, one for private Mazoon College and the other for state-run Sultan Qaboos University. The partnerships were positively reviewed by a MEPI evaluation team in February 2007, and both have met their basic objectives of providing U.S. technical expertise to the local institutions. The

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latter program, with its focus on Qservice learningQ and particularly enthusiastic reception by SQU, better demonstrates the impact and potential for similar activities in the future.

PROS: Positive reception by linked Omani institutions; cooperative activities met frequently expressed local need for access to current U.S. thinking and best practices in higher education; highly independent programs that, once instituted, ran independently with minimal input from Post.

CONS: Low-profile programs with minimal public recognition of MEPI or the USG role in creating the linkages; small number (two) of linkages created.

GRADE: B

PILLAR II: EMPOWERING WOMEN

10. (U) The overarching goal of Women's Pillar projects in Oman is to better equip Omani women with vital skills to fully utilize their talents in the public sphere, including business, community service, and governance.

11. (U) WOMEN IN TECHNOLOGY (WIT)

PROGRAM PARTNER: Institute of International Education (IIE)

CAPSULE: WIT, operating in partnership with Oman Women's Association chapters (OWAs), was designed to empower underserved women by giving them technical skills to become pioneers for change. The 10-week program includes five core activities: Professional Development Training, Business Planning for Sustainability, IT Training through Microsoft's Unlimited Potential (UP) Curriculum, Women's Professional Development Network, and Professional Exchange and Capacity Building. The WIT program has been extremely successful, with high demand meeting or, in one case, exceeding capacity in most centers. Some participants have described it as a life-changing event. The program has demonstrated consistent and well planned growth throughout Oman. To date, WIT has trained 737 women, with another 121 presently enrolled. Currently, there are 12 WIT centers, with plans for 11 more to be opened with help from Oman's Information Technology Authority (ITA).

PROS: Equips women with skills that generally cannot be obtained elsewhere; builds capacity of OWAs to run programming and engage in community outreach; serves as a platform for new and follow-on programming; offered several opportunities for media recognition of MEPI programming.

CONS: Each OWA chapter has unique leadership, making them inconsistent partners and resulting in a few instances of underperformance and/or lack of cooperation.

GRADE: A

¶12. (U) WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT PROJECT

PROGRAM PARTNER: International Republican Institute (IRI)

CAPSULE: Women in Oman generally lack experience in how to participate in the political process. To help expand the role of women in governance and civic activism, IRI plans to build the capacity of OWAs so that they can better provide the skills and encouragement necessary for women to fully participate in public life. The original program funded by this grant, titled "Women's Empowerment and Voter Education" (WEAVE), was unexpectedly rejected by the Council of Ministers despite earlier having received full support and approval from the Ministry of Social Development (MOSD). In late 2007, Post revised the intended program to drop its voter education component, along with the apparently sensitive word "empowerment", and submitted it to the MOSD. The MOSD expressed keen interest in program as revised and embarked on a needs-assessment survey to determine what specific activities would most benefit the OWAs. The MOSD expects to complete this comprehensive evaluation in June 2008. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has also indicated a greater willingness to move forward.

PROS: Responds to local needs; can lay groundwork for future women's programs.

CONS: Lack of official support outside the MOSD to date.

GRADE: Incomplete

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PILLAR III: BUILDING POLITICAL CAPACITY

¶13. (U) Political Pillar programs in Oman are aimed at strengthening the Sultanate's fledgling democratic processes; increasing transparency and rule of law in the judiciary; encouraging public participation in governance; and creating a more active civil society.

¶14. (U) LEGISLATIVE STRENGTHENING

PROGRAM PARTNER: International Republican Institute (IRI)

CAPSULE: This program seeks to strengthen democratic processes by building the capacity of the Majlis al-Shura, the directly

elected lower house of Oman's bicameral assembly. Training and study trips help both staff and members to improve their abilities to review and amend legislation, conduct parliamentary inquiries, and engage with constituents on matters of public concern. While IRI has been offering training and technical assistance to Majlis staff since 1999, the organization recently made significant progress by providing training directly to Majlis members, including an orientation course for winners of the October 2007 national elections. The Oman IRI representative has observed that the IRI-Majlis relationship has at last developed from merely one of traditional Oman hospitality to one of genuine trust and substantive cooperation. This trust was demonstrated, for example, when Majlis leadership asked IRI earlier this year for help in offering training sessions during Oman's hosting of parliaments/assemblies from other Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, as well as by the scope and seriousness of Majlis efforts to get scheduled training back on track as soon as possible after a tropical cyclone hit Muscat in June 2007. The newly appointed Majlis president, unlike his predecessor, has shown support for this project.

PROS: Assists Oman in developing a more representative form of governance; succeeded in finally providing training directly to members; creation of relationship of trust between IRI and Majlis al-Shura; enhancement of the broader Post relationship with the Majlis.

CONS: Has taken significant time to build relationships required for effective programming; difficult to measure progress to date.

GRADE: B-

¶15. (U) STRENGTHENING JUDICIAL INDEPENDENCE
PROGRAM PARTNER: American Bar Association (ABA)

CAPSULE: Addressing the need for enhanced transparency and adherence to the rule of law in Oman, the American Bar Association (ABA) embarked on a program to provide training and technical assistance to the Ministry of Justice's (MOJ) Judicial Training Institute (JTI), create a legal clinic at the College of Law at Sultan Qaboos University (SQU), and conduct public legal education initiatives with the Ministry of Legal Affairs (MLA). During 2007 and 2008, the ABA held judicial workshops on money laundering and cyber-crime, as well as a train-the-trainers session to facilitate sustained judicial capacity building. The ABA's workshop on the fundamentals of labor law brought together judges and officials from the Ministry of Manpower (MOM) to discuss labor issues for the first time. In addition to training workshops in varying subjects, the ABA is continuing to offer assistance to the MOJ as it develops its plans for the JTI. SQU is planning to open its legal clinic in fall 2008, and the MLA is developing a topic for the legal-awareness campaign. The current ABA representative has developed strong relationships with the MOJ, MLA, and College of Law which has paved the way for future USG programming.

PROS: Promotes sorely needed public legal awareness; enhances relationships within Oman's complex judicial structure; addresses well recognized Omani need to improve professionalism in and correct application of Omani law by judges in court cases.

CONS: Non-continuous ABA presence; dealing with three disconnected Omani bureaucracies (MOJ, SQU and MLA) slowed adherence to original timeline; each local partner demonstrated inconsistent levels of buy-in and support.

GRADE: B

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¶16. (U) BUILDING LEADERSHIP SKILLS AMONG OMANI YOUTH

PROGRAM PARTNER: AIESEC USA

CAPSULE: This program addresses the need to build a rising generation of capable, experienced, and community-oriented leaders well versed in democratic principles. AIESEC seeks to establish on-campus chapters at universities and colleges throughout Oman. Each chapter is designed to be a leadership training and networking vehicle through which students practice democratic processes through group elections and community involvement. Since the AIESEC leadership's arrival in August 2007, AIESEC Oman has successfully established itself at the Modern College of Business and Science (MCBS) and as of June 2008 has interacted with roughly 150 students and secured 15 active members. In addition to their professional roles, the four AIESEC leaders have integrated themselves into the student community, giving Omanis a chance to interact with bright and articulate American young people.

PROS: Students engage in democratic processes and practice hands-on leadership; encourages civic involvement and volunteering; builds local and international networks; creates a positive image of the U.S. among the next generation of Omani leaders.

CONS: Bureaucracy and cultural resistance at educational institutions and at the Ministry of Higher Education (which oversees activities at public institutions) have prevented desired expansion of the program.

GRADE: B

¶17. (U) MIDDLE EAST FREE TRADE AREA (MEFTA) TECHNICAL

ASSISTANCE -LABOR

PROGRAM PARTNER: Department of Labor

COMMENT: Though program is categorized with MEPI as an Economic Pillar project, this grant better reflects PostQs political priorities given the vital role that labor unions may play in promoting democratic principles and practices.
END COMMENT.

CAPSULE: Labor technical assistance programming during 2007 was designed to: foster collaboration among business, labor, and government; help employers and unions better represent their constituents and defend their interests; and build the government's capacity to implement reforms and uphold core labor standards. The Department of Labor sole-sourced the project to the International Labor Organization (ILO), which completed its MEPI-funded activities in Oman in February 2008 with several concrete achievements, particularly through its work with Oman's Ministry of Manpower (MOM). The ILO expanded the Ministry's capacity to enforce labor laws and protect worker rights by training approximately 100 labor inspectors and helping the MOM develop new occupational health and safety regulations. The MOM used its own funds to build on the ILO training, enrolling its trainees in a six-month English language course so that they could better communicate better with Oman's foreign workforce. In its work with unions, the ILO helped the General Federation Q the provisional national-level workers' representative body Q draft a constitution and prepare for national elections, scheduled to take place in late 2008. The ILO was less successful in its outreach to businesses, however, and provided little assistance to unions at the enterprise level.

PROS: Expanded capacity of MOM to uphold labor law; ILO, as a respected international organization, lends broader support for achieving Mission goals concerning labor and trafficking-in-persons in Oman.

CONS: No success in engaging partners among private-sector companies or employer groups.

GRADE: B

¶18. (U) BUILDING TRADE UNION CAPACITY

PROGRAM PARTNER: Solidarity Center (SC)

COMMENT: Though program is categorized with MEPI as an Economic Pillar project, this grant better reflects PostQs political priorities given the vital role that labor unions may play in promoting democratic principles and practices.
END COMMENT.

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CAPSULE: SC was prepared to launch programming in January 2008 with a focus on developing the capacity of enterprise-level unions to engage in collective bargaining, conduct elections, and communicate with their members. SC's program plan also included helping unions develop sectoral representation and establish "win-win" partnerships with companies at both the firm and industry sector level. SC's work with individual unions should complement that of the ILO, which focuses primarily on national-level institutions. However, the Acting Chairman of the General Federation, Post's primary labor interlocutor to date, requested that SC postpone the start of its activities until after the Federation holds its elections sometime in 2008. SC programming, therefore, remains on hold. Without SC, Post has been unable to provide Oman's approximately 45 enterprise-level unions with necessary capacity-building assistance.

PROS: Potential to assist unions to act as a grassroots model of democracy for Omani workers and to develop into a force for social change.

CONS: Lack of capacity in the General Federation; weak local support.

GRADE: Incomplete

PILLAR IV: SUPPORTING ECONOMIC PROGRESS

¶19. (U) The overarching goals of Economic Pillar activities in Oman are to support implementation of the U.S.-Oman Free Trade Agreement (FTA) and to provide technical expertise on the revision of economic and commercial legislation and regulations to meet FTA standards.

¶120. (U) MEFTA TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

PROGRAM PARTNER: Department of Commerce - CLDP

CAPSULE: To assist Oman in outlining a "roadmap" of its outstanding FTA obligations, MEPI, under the auspices of Commercial Law Development Program (CLDP), funded the visit of a leading trade expert to Muscat in May 2007. This expert guided the Omanis in drafting FTA-compliant understandings regarding issues such as customs administration, textile monitoring, government procurement, transparency, and telecommunications. In addition, MEPI sponsored the visit of a former Federal Communications Commission licensing expert to assist the Telecommunications Regulatory Authority (TRA) in developing FTA-compliant telecommunications licensing regulations. Over the past three years, CLDP has solidified its working relationships with key government entities, including the Ministry of Justice, the Capital Markets Authority, and the Information Technology Authority, and has reviewed revisions to Oman's commercial, capital market, insurance, and e-commerce laws.

PROS: Provides opportunity to shape Oman's commercial legal landscape; promotes stronger ties with key government and business-oriented institutions; sharpened the focus of the Omani government on the outstanding requirements of the FTA.

CONS: Omani sluggishness in adopting several proposed recommendations provided by the consultants.

GRADE: A-

¶21. (U) MEFTA TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE-CUSTOMS
PROGRAM PARTNER: U.S. Customs and Border Protection

CAPSULE: MEPI sponsored two customs-administration training workshops provided by CLDP, in association with U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP). The workshops, which provided the Omani Customs authorities with information needed to change the way they inspect and admit goods into Oman, introduced innovative concepts such as "importer-based verifications" and "advance rulings." They also covered complex obligations associated with the export processing of textile products. The visit of an Omani delegation to the U.S. to study CBP operations will build on locally-provided training.

PROS: Oman better aware of and better-prepared to meet FTA customs obligations.

CONS: Visit of Omami delegation to study domestic CBP

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operations delayed by CBP since November 2007; Oman yet to fully implement all training recommendations.

GRADE: B+

¶22. (U) MEFTA TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE - USPTO (I & II)
PROGRAM PARTNER: U.S. Patent and Trademark Office

CAPSULE: The U.S. Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO) has sponsored three workshops over the past two years to strengthen the ability of Omani investigators, customs officials, judges, and prosecutors in handling intellectual property rights infractions. The sessions raised general awareness of intellectual property issues and provided expert advice in enhancing border protection efforts and in detecting satellite signal theft. Oman has also sent a number of officials to the United States to participate in USPTO's Global Intellectual Property Academy training sessions, which provide a well-rounded overview of intellectual property protections.

PROS: Responds to need for IPR training for a wide-range of Omani officials in advance of FTA implementation.

CONS: Despite the efforts of the USPTO, questions remain as to how capable and committed Oman will be in prosecuting IPR violations.

GRADE: B+

¶23. (U) MEFTA TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE - EPA
PROGRAM PARTNER: U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

CAPSULE: To meet the environment commitments enshrined in the US-Oman FTA, MEPI sponsored four EPA workshops in Muscat, ranging from pollution prevention and cleaner production techniques to environmental impact statements and the role of science and public participation in the rule-making process.

PROS: Positive participant response at workshops; brings together Oman's various environmental stakeholders to discuss relevant issues; enhances strong Omani commitment to environmental protection.

CONS: Light attendance at the first EPA workshop, aimed at government officials.

GRADE: B

¶24. (U) PUBLIC COMMENT SYSTEMS
PROGRAM PARTNER: Department of the Interior

CAPSULE: The U.S. Department of Interior began support for the Environmental Society of Oman (ESO) in mid-April 2008 through a MEPI-funded grant to provide expertise and training for

rangers in their efforts to protect Oman's endangered sea turtles at Masirah Island. The program will also fund the DOI's efforts to assist Oman in understanding its new obligations as a recent signatory to the Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES).

PROS: Assists Oman in managing the environmental impact of economic development with limited technical knowledge and resources.

CONS: Oman may move slowly in taking the Department of Interior up on its offer to provide technical assistance.

GRADE: Incomplete

¶25. (U) TRADE/WTO SEMINARS; WTO TA; TIFA
PROGRAM PARTNER: Booz Allen Hamilton

CAPSULE: Booz Allen Hamilton (BAH) has completed several projects for Oman as part of a technical assistance package to better understand the economic strengths of the Sultanate in light of the FTA. The first project delivered was a competitiveness analysis of Oman's economy. A follow-on study provided recommendations for Oman's proposed convention center, which will spawn small and medium-sized (SME) downstream possibilities as well as Omani employment. BAH also completed a three-sector FTA analysis, which included an executive summary on the general benefits of the FTA and recommendations for three business/commercial sectors in which Oman would enjoy a comparative advantage.

PROS: Provided the Embassy with reference material to better

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explain the positive impacts of free trade to Oman; fostered stronger relationships with key government and private institutions.

CONS: The Omani government would have been better placed to hire BAH, rather than MEPI; it is uncertain what Oman will do with the results of the studies.

GRADE: B

CONCLUSION: REALISM, PATIENCE, AND PARTNERSHIP

¶26. (SBU) In reviewing the breadth of MEPI activities in Oman, Post identified several factors that directly contributed to the extent of a program's results and impact. When goals were realistic, when timelines were sufficiently flexible to reflect local cultural standards and inevitable bureaucratic delays, and when activities truly became partnerships among the USG, program implementers, and the Omanis involved, they achieved concrete results and laid the groundwork for future bilateral cooperation, both through MEPI and other channels. Conversely, when goals have outstripped Omani readiness (as in the original WEAVE project), when time has been limited (as in the ABA's original mandate, now extended), or when the Omani perception has been one of American lack of commitment (as in the response to the interruption of PSP programming), results have been compromised. Oman's greatest MEPI successes have been achieved when the given project addressed recognized needs or interest of the Omanis and was a true collaborative effort, with both parties dedicating the necessary resources and listening carefully to the interests of the other.

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